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NEGOTIATE NOW?

A Business Man's Answer

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THE HAND OF KULTUR

An Interview with LORD LEVERHULME

by HAROLD BEGBIE

(Reprinted from "THE DAILY CHRONICLE")

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Lord Leverhulme is a Liberal in politics, a strong Free Trader, a pioneer in many paths of social amelioration, and one of the greatest captains of industry that the country has produced in our time; his business is world-wide, and before the war it had ramifications in nearly every country. A man with so many international connections and so much experience of the possibilities of negotiation might be expected to favour negotiation now if it offered any chance of a favourable result. It will be seen that in his opinion it offers none, and never will until Germany is beaten.

NEGOTIATE NOW?

LORD LEVERHULME ON A GERMAN PEACE.

"Would you," I asked, "go to a peace conference with Germany at the present time?"

Lord Leverhulme opened his eyes. "Before she is beaten?"

"The theory is——" I began.

"Never! Never! Why, is there a single man holding a responsible position who would suggest such a thing?"

"You mean that Germany in her present mood——"

"I mean that Germany in any mood, until she is beaten, is not to be trusted."

"But you know what the argument is: suppose we go to a peace conference, and suppose that Germany comes out from that conference in warlike mood, we should be able by the economic weapon to bring her to reason."

"BURGLAR MORALITY."

"You will never get Germany to entertain just peace terms until she is beaten. She might agree to terms which seemed just, which seemed as if they promised peace, but she would never honour her signature. I can imagine her delegates going out from such a conference shaking with laughter and hugging themselves with joy, because they had fooled the English. How can a man in his senses believe for a moment that Germany would keep her word? She has told us that treaties are not binding. She has said categorically that she would break a treaty that is not in her interest. She has not only said these things, she has done them. The greatest

of all her crimes is this burglar morality which she has introduced into Europe. Would a business man trade with a firm which proclaimed Germanic principles? Would it be safe to deal with such a state of mind? Nothing in the modern history of Europe is more menacing to the civilised life of democracy than this German state of mind—this state of mind which repudiates treaties and dishonours a solemn word."

CHANGE OF MIND NECESSARY.

"But there are reasonable men in Germany."

"Many; but they don't control the Government."

"Don't you think that when peace is established and German democracy finds that it is ruined, don't you think that then the war caste will be broken and a new system of government will be set up?"

"That change will only come when Germany is convinced that war does not pay."

"Exactly. And the argument is that you can only bring home to Germany the fact of her economic ruin by establishing peace on the basis of a league of nations?"

"But you will never be able to dictate terms to Germany till she is beaten. The argument you mention is founded on the dangerous fallacy that because Germany is sick of this war she is sick of war in general. She isn't. I doubt if her Government is even sick of this war. You've read the speech of that old brigand Hertling. Is there any sign of repentance in that speech? Is it a chastened speech? Is it the speech of a statesman who wants disarmament and a league of nations?

BACK TO THE 1914 MOOD.

"No! Germany is back in her mood of 1914. She believes she is winning the war. She believes

she has won it now. And if we talk peace to her she has won it. Yes, Germany has won, and England is beaten. Why, it would be better a thousand times that every man in England should be dead than that Germany should issue from this war with the feelings of a conqueror. You hear people use the phrase 'to the last man, and the last shilling,' and you think it is only a bit of rhetoric; but to my mind it's the most solemn and absolute truth. I mean when I say it that it would in very truth be a million times better for the people of these islands to be dead, every one of them, rather than live on as the serfs of triumphant Prussia."

MEANING OF HERTLING'S SPEECH.

"We must hold fast, you mean, till Germany says she has had enough, never mind how long it may last?"

"Certainly. The salvation of the world depends upon it. We are back to 1914. We are confronted by a Germany which believes itself to be the lord of the nations. Russia is out. Rumania is out. Italy has received a hard blow. France and England are the only enemies left who remain to be crushed. Germany means to crush them before America gets into her stride. She believes she can crush them. All this talk of peace heartens her. She thinks we are war-weary. She thinks she can endure longer than we can. She is flushed with triumph. She is absolutely cock-a-hoop. Why, look at Hertling's speech! Dare a man suggest that we should surrender Malta and Gibraltar, and all the rest of it, if he were not confident of victory? Think of the mere audacity of it! When have we ever used Malta and Gibraltar for the oppression of nations? Look at our colonies! They are free to all the Germans who choose to go there. Any German

can go to our colonies and buy raw material or set up for himself in business. We have used the British Empire for the good of the human race.

HYPOCRISY AND CONFIDENCE.

"And this Germany, whose colonies are bolted and barred against mankind, who no sooner got Heligoland than she transformed it into a menace against England, whose whole spirit is tribal and selfish and arrogant—this Germany dares to speak of the British Empire as a danger to humanity! What hypocrisy, and what confidence! Why, she was never in more truculent mood. It was never more necessary than it is now for England to hold fast. England with her Allies must go on fighting until Germany comes to her senses and realises that free men really mean what they say when they declare that death is better than enslavement."

OUR ROCK OF DEFENCE.

"You think we can outlast Germany?"

"I'm perfectly sure of it. Our people are not so sheepish, but they're of sterner stuff. The population of this country is composed of wonderful material. All down the ages men have come to England out of other countries because they would not bow to tyranny. We have been the rock of defence to many thousands of fine spirits who could not breathe the air of autocracies. I believe our moral stamina has been enormously strengthened by these refugees. We have freedom in our blood. We feel that liberty is as necessary to us as air. When it is brought home to our people that this war is for freedom or slavery you'll hear no talk of peace, no plausible suggestions for a conference; you'll hear nothing but the word, passed from man to man, Hold Fast!

"I'm sure of this in Lancashire. The Lancashire spirit is never cowed and seldom daunted. You tell me that even our pacifists would fight to the last if Germany still dealt imperialistically with the nations at a peace conference. I believe that this is true of all England. Our only danger is that the pacifist suggests to Germany that timorous souls over here are looking for any other way out of this war than the way of victory. The more that suggestion gets abroad, the more cheerfully will Germany harden her heart. The only thing that can dismay the German Government is our resolute announcement that we'll fight, and go on fighting, yes, if it takes us twenty years more, till Germany asks us for peace. That's the true Englishness of this war, and the sooner it's known in Germany the sooner the war will be over."

WHEN GERMANY MAY BE TRUSTED.

"And when the German asks for peace you'd admit him to the league of nations?"

"I'll trust Germany when I know she is convinced that war does not pay. Till then I would as soon think of trusting anything she says as I'd trust a forger or a thief. Out and away the most dreadful thing she has done is to shake men's confidence in contracts. That is a crime of the greatest magnitude. She is a confessed brigand. The moral law means nothing to her. She herself has proclaimed to all the world that she is above the moral law. She has introduced anarchy into the society of nations. She has pulled civilisation to pieces. She has dragged the whole earth back to tribal barbarism. The very suggestion that we should dream of conferring with such a nation strikes me as madness. Germany herself has told us she is not to be trusted."

"Russia is out. Rumania is out. Italy has received a hard blow. France and England are the only enemies left who remain to be crushed. Germany means to crush them before America gets into her stride. She believes she can crush them. All this talk of peace heartens her."

—*Lord Leverhulme.*

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